

## Reflections on Dr. Mark Hutchinson's "Third Race and Third Culture - Academic Freedom in Pentecostal Colleges: the View from Australia"

The parameters of academic freedom ranging from geographic considerations (Europe, USA, and Australia) to the secular/religious and private/public impasse, was introduced by Dr. Hutchinson. Avoiding the common *faux pas* of blaming academic freedom on the Enlightenment<sup>1</sup> or that it is just about faculty and not the student, we have been given a great foundation to work this issue out anew within our own contexts. Most importantly, we have been encouraged to contextualize academic freedom within the Pentecostal worldview. One where the normative academic relationships: faculty-student-administration has been made more complex by a quasi-adversarial role taken by the nebulous Pentecostal church and its pastors/organizational leadership. The key components that have to be worked into the Pentecostal model are "promise [or compact], membership, discipline, commitment to truth, search, dissemination, and the common good." (Hutchinson, 15, also 7-8)

I would like to highlight two points. One is to make a differentiation between academic freedom in scholarship and academic freedom in pedagogy. The second is to reflect in a short fashion on the good that academic freedom can provide for the Pentecostal church world.

### 1. Academic Freedom & Scholarship

1.1 A snapshot of what scholarship entails may be a helpful ingredient in our upcoming discussions on academic freedom. Dr. Kelly from George Mason University presents a simple working description: ". . . it is the result of original research; it has an argument of some sort and that argument is situated in a preexisting conversation among scholars; it is public, it is peer reviewed; and it has an audience response."<sup>2</sup> Academic freedom within the context of scholarship is not a radically individualistic adventure. Although new and original ideas are a given, these ideas have a logical and hopefully well-reasoned presentation that interacts with scholars both past and present. Its public nature - instead of a clandestine teaching, combined with a peer review - experts in the field rather than dilettantes - fosters an open and transparent environment. Ultimately, scholarship is never intended to be a monologue, but rather a voice in a polyphonic stream. Academic freedom is intended to allow the one voice to blend with that stream to form the symphony.

1.2 In the world of research, James Barr noted that, "Research requires freedom of thought; if this is lacking, it only means that the research will be less good, in extreme cases that it will dry up altogether. Freedom is not something that should have to be wrung from a reluctant grasp: the church should promote freedom, because freedom is part of the gospel."<sup>3</sup> As Hutchinson has quoted John 8.36, so Barr identifies freedom as a core of the gospel message that allows for one to uncover original ideas in the context of scholarship. The rub comes when we ask how much "freedom"? and if this freedom means that a

---

<sup>1</sup> William J. Hoye, "The Religious Roots of Academic Freedom," *TS* 58 (1997), 410-14. Hoye discusses the lack of freedom with in the academic work of such scholars as: Christian Woff at Halle; Immanuel Kant and Frederick the Great; Johann Gottlieb Fichte at Jena. He ultimately argues that the specific university practice of academic freedom grew out of the medieval Christian universities. See William J. Courtenay, "Inquiry and Inquisition: Academic Freedom in Medieval Universities," *Church History* 58, no. 2 (1989), 168-81.

<sup>2</sup> T. Mills Kelly, "Making Digital Scholarship Count (3)," *edwired*, August 2, 2008, <http://edwired.org/?p=317>. Gerald Gerbrandt, "Scholars as Servants of the Church," *Direction* 33, no. 2 (2004), 134 writes about the university having three tasks: "(1) the preservation of knowledge, (2) the dissemination of knowledge, (3) the advancement of knowledge." For Gerbrandt, scholarship is specifically the third task.

<sup>3</sup> James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 110.

scholar must close his eyes to his faith commitments, whether belief in God in general or classical Pentecostal distinctives.<sup>4</sup>

1.3 Although the history of critical scholarship produced many academic martyrs whose quest for and commitment to truth ended in defrockment or loss of teaching posts, these are not isolated in time and space. The recent firing of Dr. Peter Enns by the board of trustees and president of Westminster Theological Seminary (WTS) brings the message close to home. His scholarly enterprise with his book, *Inspiration & Incarnation*<sup>5</sup> was deemed not "faithful to the institution's mission as a confessional Reformed Seminary." However, in the same statement his work was considered to be "within the purview of Evangelical thought."<sup>6</sup> The *opinio communis* claims that a private institution such as WTS should have the right and privilege to terminate a tenured professor no matter what, since they have clearly articulated theological parameters. Even though the remaining faculty, who would be Enns' peers with competence to make the judgment, voted for him, the board of trustees prevailed. However, things may not be as simple as this. WTS is an accredited graduate institution that should abide by a broader standard than just internal consistency. It seems to me that an accreditation agency that functions as a watchdog for inter-institutional relations, working on agreed standards, needs to be considered in such conversations. The argument that private educational institutions can do whatever they like is only valid if those institutions are not planning to relate to the larger academic and for a seminary, the larger religious world around them.<sup>7</sup>

1.4 Along similar lines Charles Hedrick has discussed the problem of when a scholar feels that "truth" can no longer be identified with the community's faith.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Academic Freedom and Pedagogy:

2.1 William Hoye's study notes that the Aristotelian concept of "freedom of science," was foundational to the concept of academic freedom. These ideas were the basis for a theological pedagogy that emphasized learning via doubting. As Aquinas put it, "no one can search for truth who has not previously known doubt." In this way the theological student was encouraged/forced to use reason rather than swallowing the authoritative traditions without deep integration. The crux here is the relationship between authority and reason and the use of the pedagogical tool called doubt. This method supposedly produced clergy that could later stand the trials of their faith via a cognitive and spiritual training. It required an academic bubble that would insulate the novitiates during those

---

<sup>4</sup> See Michael V. Fox, "Bible Scholarship and Faith-Based Study: My view," *SBL Forum 2006*, August 2, 2008, <http://www.sbl-site.org/publications/article.aspx?articleId=490>, who argues that "faith-based study has no place in academic scholarship." See also Roland Boer, ed., *Secularism and Biblical Studies* (London: Equinox Publishing, 2008), a collection of essays stemming from Fox's reflections.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

<sup>6</sup> See the Joint Statement of Westminster Theological Seminary and Peter Enns, at Peter Enns, "A Time to Tear Down / A Time to Build up," August 2, 2008, <http://peterennsonline.com/joint-statement-of-westminster-theological-seminary-and-peter-enns/>.

<sup>7</sup> George M. Marsden, "Liberating Academic Freedom," *First Things* 88 (1988), 11-14, would however defend the rights of the Christian colleges and universities in the USA. The issues for Marsden are centered around the origins of the AAUP and their imposition into the religious academic institutions. See George M. Marsden, "The Ambiguities of Academic Freedom," *Church History* 62, no. 2 (1993), 220-36. James Neuchterlein, "The Idol of Academic Freedom," *First Things*, 38 (1993), 12-16, argues for the maintenance of a "perpetual state of irresolvable and therefore unsettling uncertainty" on academic freedom issues within these universities. Nevertheless, he views the Christian educational institutions as independent from outside agencies.

<sup>8</sup> Charles W. Hedrick, "On wearing two hats while standing on a banana peel: Confessional statements in Theological Education," *PRS* 11, no. 2 (1984), 105-14.

periods of doubt-inducements, therefore academic freedom.

2.2 James Loder in his epochal work, *The Transforming Moment*,<sup>9</sup> back in the 80s argued for a conflictual learning model for spiritual growth. As I have argued elsewhere his approach is more appropriate for “Pentecostal spirituality.” He argues that spiritual learning has its own unique methodology. We learn spiritual truths when confronted with a conflict, or crisis we have not faced before. Learning begins as we approach the conflict and through what Loder calls an “interlude for scanning.” In this stage, one perceives that he or she does not have the solution for this new problem, therefore, we begin a process of constructive imagination. Learning progresses as the solution comes with a sense of “release and openness” toward a new way of dealing with reality. This “release and openness” sometimes even takes a verbal form with the expression of an “aha!” The final stage for Loder, is that of interpretation. Here full assimilation and integration of the initial conflict takes place. The medieval university pedagogy which forced doubt on the novitiate seems to have worked in a similar manner.

3. The problem of using a "doubt" method or Loder's conflictual model is that there needs to be a substantial level of trust in the faculty, enough to give academic freedom within this pedagogical domain. The necessity for such discussions comes from following an educational rather than indoctrinational model. Experience in Pentecostal theological training has taught me that off-hand remarks by students may result in the faculty or institution being accused of liberalism or false teaching. The role of the school's administration is to protect the instructor who is working within this framework as Hutchinson also points out. The pedagogical sphere of academic freedom is a crucial ingredient in a deeper cognitive and spiritual training.

### 3. Academic Freedom and the Church:

3.1 Liberated by justification by faith rather than knowledge of the truth is an important Reformational foundation to healthy intellectual inquiry.<sup>10</sup> An emphasis on the priesthood of believers may also lay the ground work for academic freedom within a church context.<sup>11</sup> The church's affirmation of *ecclesia semper reformanda* invites a critical reflection on even denominational distinctives or the articulation of say the USA Assemblies of God statement of fundamental truths.

3.2 Gerald Gerbrandt wrote, "to pit academic freedom against responsibility to serve the church is logically problematic and strategically unhelpful."<sup>12</sup> But then, how do academic freedom and the church relate to each other? Jesse Ziegler, in a straight forward article entitled, "Academic freedom in the service of the church," unpacks the helpful aspects by presenting four ways in which the church may be served by granting academic freedom to faculties of ministerial training organizations.<sup>13</sup> First, freedom assists in academicians dealing with and addressing contemporary issues that arise in the Church. New questions are approached by constructing tentative working hypotheses based on the wealth of knowledge that is available. Second, academic freedom provides the church with a means of self-criticism, self-correction, and even self-renewal. Academic freedom may be one way the necessity and the way to correction is achieved. Third, academic freedom helps

---

<sup>9</sup> James Loder, *The Transforming Moment* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981).

<sup>10</sup> George C. Reese, "A Basis for Intellectual Freedom," *LQ*, 7, no. 3 (1955), 271.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas H. Graves, "Freedom of Academic Inquiry Drives Authentic Theological Education," *Baptist History and Heritage* 39, no. 1 (2004), 38.

<sup>12</sup> Gerbrandt, "Scholars as Servants of the Church," 133.

<sup>13</sup> Jesse H. Ziegler, "Academic freedom in the service of the church," *TE* 12, no. 2 (1976), 120-23.

the church to see its present situation as a continuum of sacred history, bringing a broader perspective on the present. Fourth, any gathering of fallen humans, organized fellowships, denominations or sects tend to work on self-preservation and ultimately become a means of repression. Academic freedom can help identify the oppressive tendencies by bringing them to light.

#### 4. Conclusion:

4.1 Neuchterlein says it all when he wrote, ". . . any university worthy of the name will remain a place where people are involved in deep and fundamental argument with each other. That is simply - and gloriously - the nature of the place."<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Neuchterlein, "The Idol of Academic Freedom, 15.